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SUBJECT: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION: GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION AND  
INFLUENCE PEDDLING; INDICTMENT OF KUWAITI EDITOR

11. SUMMARY: Op/ed by Ambassador Jones on the Middle East Roadmap receives fulsome coverage in today's print media, including four Arabic and two English newspapers.

Charges of corruption and governmental malfeasance dominate all Arabic dailies over the past week as the country prepares for July 5 parliamentary elections. Indignation against the government for preferring charges against a Kuwaiti editor for slandering the ruling family continues apace, with liberal Kuwait University professor Ahmed al-Baghdadi--himself once imprisoned for lese majeste--penning a harsh attack on the Minister of Information for allegedly asserting that the ruling family of Kuwait "gave" the country democracy. END SUMMARY.

12. HEADLINES:

--All newspapers (6/16): De facto Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed, called for combating wasta (influence) in the government body and said that: "for every wasta, someone's right goes to waste."

--All newspapers (6/16): Cabinet discussed corruption issues and the freezing of recent decision undertaken by elected Ministers who will be running for elections.

--All newspapers (6/16): National Assembly Speaker, Jassim Al-Khorafi, also a candidate for parliamentary elections called on the ruling family to settle any issues they have through decisive decisions. Al-Khorafi argued that the National Assembly was beginning to lose its credibility with Kuwaiti citizens.

--Al-Watan (6/14): Journalists without Borders sent a letter to Minister of Information, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Fahd, expressing concern for referring Editor-in-Chief of Arabic daily Al-Watan, Mohammed Al-Jassim, to the Public Prosecutor. (Front page)

--Al-Qabas (6/14): conducted a poll among 800 Kuwaitis whereby 85% said they think that corruption in Kuwait is "extremely serious" or "serious".

--All newspapers (6/18): the Kuwaiti Journalists Association called on Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed to withdraw the government's claim against the editor-in-chief of Al-Watan newspaper who was recently referred to the Public Prosecutor and charged with contesting the Amir's authorities. The association argued that the decision reflects negatively on Kuwait's democratic image, especially during the elections time.

13. Liberal Saud Al-Samaka wrote in independent Al-Qabas (6/18): Influence (wasta) has reached the core the core of this society and has contaminated it with corruption.. Influence has deprived our youths of the spirit of initiation and national loyalty. It has also shed a negative light on society to the extent that our country is now being characterized as anarchic and as a society of thieves and bribes.."

14. Liberal Nabeel Al-Fadl wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-Aam (6/18): "We must agree that funding election campaigns is a legitimate right and a proper application of the democratic process. The President of the United States has earned his elected office through funding by various groups that saw him as their best representative. This is the same for all members of the Congress and the Senate.. Therefore, funding election campaigns is a legitimate, democratic process in principle. Yet, what is forbidden is using public funds or charity donations to fund these campaigns. The money paid must come from private sources and donations by those who see that the candidate represents their best interests. Even such donations must have a ceiling in order

not to exceed the real need of election campaigns and therefore deviate from their proper cause and legitimate path.. In order to achieve that, we must have transparency and must announce the source of funding and the amount of each donation in comparison with the actual expenses of the campaign. This process must also be monitored by a judicial committee to monitor and audit."

15. Kuwait University professor, Hasan Abdulla Abbas, wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-Aam (6/16): "We never expected the government to accuse elected ministers of being deficient in their duties and that corruption has dominated their ministries due to election interests... Unfortunately, corruption has spread throughout the government body and from the top to the bottom of the ministerial hierarchy.. It is also disgusting to witness the class system in our National Assembly. Members of parliament are more biased towards their blue blood, instead of defending principles and the rights of citizens."

16. Parliament in Kuwait Lacks a Vision and Opposes Reform  
Liberal political science professor, Dr. Shafeeq Al-Ghabra, wrote in independent Al-Rai Al-Aam (6/16): "Kuwait is carrying heavy burdens that are hindering its development. Its first burden is a parliament that lacks reform and where many of its members do not believe in freedom of thought and equality, not only between men and women, but also between one human being and the other. What is more dangerous is that the nature of the election system (vote buying and lack of laws that allow political parties) is in dire need for reform."

17. Liberal Kuwait University Political Science professor, Dr. Ahmed Al-Baghdadi, wrote in independent Al-Seyassa (6/16): "The Minister of Information is trying, through his statements, to state that the democracy enjoyed by the Kuwaiti people since 1963 was brought on by the ruling family. This is a flagrant canard that the ruling family should not allow the young minister to foist onto the Kuwaiti people.. It is not the right of the Minister of Information or others to present democracy as if it had been bestowed on us. Unfortunately, the Kuwaiti people have lost their courage in defending their constitutional rights. In reality, I am not astonished by the statements made by the Minister of Information. It seems that excessive contact with the religious current leads to such thoughts, especially impatience with democracy.. The Kuwaiti people do not beg for their democracy from you Mr. Minister. Instead, they derive it from the constitution that holds you accountable. Yet, if your statements are derived from your capacity as a member of the ruling family, then know that the constitution does not grant you this right, neither does it grant it to others regardless of their power."